

John Bock (*1965, lives in Berlin) initially studied Business Administration before continuing his education under Franz Erhard Walther at the University of Fine Arts Hamburg until 1997. It was already during this time that he developed the format of lecture performance, which continues to shape his work today. One of the first, in 1992, entitled "Wie werde ich berühmt?" (How do I become famous?), explores the role of the artist, one's own and social expectations and possible requirements and excessive demands. These actions somewhat misleadingly perhaps referred to as "lectures" unite Dada and absurd theater, the grotesque with self-irony and always directly involve the audience. Sometimes it becomes part of the actions, but often it becomes a mirror of his own presence.

Whereas Bock initially appeared alone on the stage, he was later joined by amateur and professional actors. All of them wear strange costumes, body additions or become part of organic-looking apparatus from which it is not unusual for a slimy liquid to drip. With time the "lectures" morphed into room-filling, sprawling installations, in which the props and costumes become artistic sculptures and objects. Bock builds tunnels that visitors can only negotiate bent over, or they have to clamber over swinging bridges or rickety stairs. What interests him is chaos, questioning safety and the norm.

"His lectures are the attempt to re-define the world between drollery and absurdity. And this repeatedly produces moments of truth, which are concealed in playful seriousness," commented Peter Packesch, Director of Kunsthalle Basel, on the occasion of Bock's exhibition there in 1999. That same year Bock participated in the Venice Biennale, and three years later, in 2002, in documenta 11 in Kassel.

Bock lays no claims to consistency, clarity or narrative logic. Only a few pairs of terms or even sentences are to be understood in his actions. He loves playing with allusions, which might not intend to be or even be allusions at all. He leaves it to the viewers to find cross-references or links. These exist in an art-historical context with the Surrealists, in Dada and in Fluxus. However, Franz West and Ed Kienholz are also points of reference in his highly diverse work. Yet his works are also always characterized by a particularly playful kind of institutional criticism. Not without reason are his installations pretty much the antithesis of the aseptic white cubes of the art business. He establishes a counterpoint to the reduced exhibition rooms in which everything is spick and span and reduced to the bare essentials. His works sprawl, take up the entire room, they are colorful and startling – and capable of repeatedly shaking up his audience.

Since 2001 he has also produced numerous film and video works, whose visual language is strongly

based on the performances. Much seems to be improvised and to have been created using the simplest of means, the individual genres are combined with one another in a bold manner, and the result is a collage of text and image, which can be regarded as being completely removed from a specific time frame.

In 2010, John Bock was invited to produce something as curator and artist for the Temporäre Kunsthalle in Berlin. Bock incorporated into a hybrid of tree house and climbing frame numerous cavities and niches, and into these he installed additional art. In doing so he employed a wide variety of works from all art-related disciplines, from fashion design to "relics" of well-known actors, and integrated works by over 30 artists. He created a multimedia artwork, which might not have afforded the countless individual works of art much space, but did offer them a visual proximity and thematic affinity, something sadly lacking in many group exhibitions.

With his presentation at the Kunstverein Hamburg in 2013, John Bock is getting his first institutional show in Hamburg, a long overdue appreciation of his highly varied oeuvre. Bock transforms the first floor of the Kunstverein into a total installation uniting the various aspects of his work and functioning as a fragrance station, whose origins remain hidden to visitors.

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